

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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Praise in the Drought

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Praise in the Drought

Abstract

"God's people had endured a long drought as they waited for the Messiah, but Isaiah gives us an idea of what to do while we wait."

Posting about waiting for God's new creation from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/praise-in-the-drought/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Praise in the Drought

 [inallthings.org/praise-in-the-drought/](https://allthings.org/praise-in-the-drought/)

December 5,
2016

Howard Schaap

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 21](#)

[Isaiah 24:1-16a](#)

[I Thessalonians 4:1-12](#)

For the first twenty years of my life living on the prairie, I didn't know what big bluestem was.

Then, I read about it. I found out that big bluestem, the quintessential tall grass prairie species, was once called "the prince of the prairie," and it could grow to almost seven feet in height, tall enough that early settlers would have to stand on their horses to see over it at times. Big bluestem could actually vary in color from russet to red to purple, but viewed from the distance it looked blue—thus, the name big *bluestem*.

Interesting if irrelevant, I thought, since I'm sure it's all gone.

Then, driving down a blacktop late that July, I saw along the side of the road a purple shoot with a turkey-foot top: big bluestem. I spent that summer and fall with my eyes more on the ditches than on the road, looking for it like you would hunt for a Q in the alphabet game on a long road trip.

"There's some big bluestem," I would say to my wife.

"There's some."

"And there's some."

"Honey, drive!" was most often the response that I got.

It was a wonderful fall. Big bluestem is in its full-color glory in late August all the way through November, and the truth of that fact quickly became obvious to me.

In these verses, Isaiah describes a curse God lays upon the land, a curse that comes from within the land itself: drought.

Even a week without rain in the summer in the Upper Midwest means that you can watch the corn leaves curl up and get spiky and pointed. In drought, corn makes its leaves into thin chutes to usher any drop of dew or drizzle down into the center cup of itself.

As corn curls, people worry. As the corn crop goes, so go all of us. Give us a couple of weeks of drought, and churches will convene a special service to pray for rain.

Corn is not well suited for drought—or, not as well as big bluestem is.

Compared to corn's shallow root, big bluestem grows deeper than it does high: the majority of the plant is beneath the ground in the root system, as much as ten feet down. In drought, big bluestem will also bloom early and then stop growing, thereby conserving energy.

The cause of the drought in this devotional passage is because people have "broken the everlasting covenant" and "defiled" the earth (vs. 5). When we violate the earth, the effects are felt by everyone equally: entrepreneur and homemaker; businessperson and farmer; banker and borrower; preacher and back pew-sitter; citizen and illegal. All

suffer. This kind of curse takes the good things from our lips, both the “new wine” and, one could imagine, the craft beer (vs. 9).

But were we to have a severe drought like this in the Upper Midwest, big bluestem would reassert itself on this, its native soil. You would look around and see it thrive while other plants wilted.

Isaiah does a fair amount of “leveling” in his writing, exalting the humble and bringing down the mighty, most notably in the famous passage foretelling John and Jesus: “Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain” (40:4).

When Jesus arrives on the scene, he himself does a whole lot of “leveling.” There’s the “sinful” woman who anoints Jesus feet with oil at the house of a “righteous” Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). There are meals with “tax collectors and sinners,” out of which the likes of Zaccheus emerge with empty pockets. There are the lepers, the bleeding, the blind—all coming back to life, all blooming again.

It’s not easy to wait upon the Lord in time of drought, but it’s then that we can look around and see things for what they are. Judgment has a way of bringing us face-to-face with ourselves. We look around and find that we’re all the same, all in need of a savior.

God’s people had endured a long drought as they waited for the Messiah, but Isaiah gives us an idea of what to do while we wait. Even when the harvest withers around them, God’s people do something unexpected: they praise. Suddenly, in the midst of all that burning up, God’s people from the west and the east and the ends of the earth “acclaim the Lord’s majesty” (vs. 14).

As you wait this Christmas season, in the midst of drought or at the onset of a long winter, as you wait for the promised one who we all need no matter how great or small, look around at what God has wrought, how he might be bringing to birth a new creation even in the midst of drought—and praise!